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Marriage, Gender, and Labor: Female-Headed Households in a Rural Cambodian Village

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Abstract

The “feminization of poverty” is apparent in regard to female-headed households, and Cambodia is not an exception. Due to the civil war and the aftermath of the Pol Pot regime, the population of women has exceeded that of men, and the ratio of female-headed households still remains relatively high. This paper is a case study of one rice-farming village in Takaev Province in the southern plain region of Cambodia. It will describe the present state of female-headed households and discuss how these women try to survive by selecting and utilizing various social and human resources within the milieu of their kinship and marriage system. Despite the fact that the household unit as means of livelihood was dismantled during the Pol Pot regime, family ties were not destroyed and households were reconstructed soon after the regime collapsed. Although the regime created many households with a deficiency of members, the kinship structure basically remains the same as before the 1970s. The nature of men’s migratory marriage sometimes brings about the easy desertion of wives, but the predominance of a matrilocal residential pattern provides female networks in the wives’ home villages. Nevertheless, the matrilocal preference does not always solve the problem of the “feminization of poverty.”

Keywords: Cambodia, female-headed household, gender, kinship, labor, livelihood, marriage, rural

I Introduction

This paper submits a preliminary discussion to analyze how the kinship and marriage system is concerned with the formation of female-headed households and the livelihood strategies of the female-heads in rural Cambodia, from the viewpoint of a case study of one rice-farming village in the southern plain region of Cambodia.

Since Cambodia returned to international society in the 1990s and welcomed various forms of aid and investment from abroad, Cambodia’s GDP has grown steadily at an average 6.5% from 1999 to 2002 [Amakawa 2003: 35]. However, there is no clear evidence that the population of the poor decreased in the 1990s; around 30–40% of the entire population is still estimated to be under the poverty line [Cambodia, MoP 1999: 11]. Most international aid resources are distributed to the capital, Phnom Penh, and a few provinces only [Ledgerwood 1998: 133]. Therefore, Cambodia has not been successful in raising the living standard of the rural

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population in general, which accounts for 84% of the whole population. As a result, rural poverty accounts for almost 90% of total poverty [Cambodia, MoP 1999: 67].

As the theme “Gender and Human Development” in the UNDP *Human Development Report 1995* recognizes that gender has become a significant issue in development, the term the “feminization of poverty” has been often mentioned since the 1990s¹⁾ in the context of overcoming poverty in the world, especially in the least developed countries. *Human Development Report 1995* estimates that 70% of the population living in poverty in the world are women [UNDP 1995: 4].²⁾ As many point out, behind the phenomenon of the feminization of poverty, there are various aspects of gender inequity in terms of gender norms, the opportunity of education and remunerative jobs, the condition of reproductive health, and so forth.

In this sense, Cambodia is not an exception. Attention has always been paid to its gender inequity, probably partly because of the theoretical and policy trends in development issues in the 1990s. The National Institute of Statistics (NIS) and the Ministry of Planning (MoP) of Cambodia published some reports on the statistical analysis of women/gender and/or poverty based on census data. However, not much of a qualitative analysis of the relationship between gender and poverty based on field data has been conducted. This paper is a trial microanalysis of gender and poverty in Cambodia. The author’s research in 2002 focused on conducting interviews regarding female household heads of the rural village in Takaev Province,³⁾ where the author had collected basic data on the kinship and marriage system in 2000.

II General Condition of Female-Headed Households in Cambodia

Imbalance of the Population among Sexes

According to the census taken in 1998, about 26% of all households in Cambodia are headed by women [NIS 2000b: 65]. In general, there are various kinds of situations in female-headed households, e.g. single households, households with an unmarried mother, households that lack a husband due to separation, divorce or death, or households with a husband who is not a main income earner, and so forth. As Table 1 indicates, the female headship rate is higher among the age group of 40 and over in both urban and rural Cambodia. Because the mortality rate of men increased due to the civil war in the 1970s and its aftermath, the sex ratio (the ratio of men to women) in the population aged 45 and over is clearly low at present; there are practically three males for every four females [*ibid.*: 8]. Also, a comparison of the widowed populations of the both sexes shows widowed women outnumber widowed men among the age group of 40 and over [*ibid.*: 13]. Therefore, it can be pointed out that one of the significant factors that produce female household heads in Cambodia is the imbalance of the population

1) This term has been used for decades, especially in the context of the policy needs of female-headed households that increased among the urban poor in both advanced and developing countries.

2) Some scholars claim that this gender ratio of poverty (70 : 30) has not been scientifically proved yet [for example, see Marcoux 1998].

3) Transliteration of the Cambodian region names in this paper is based upon that of NIS [1999].

Table 1 Headship Rates* by Age and Sex, Cambodia, 1998

Age	Total		Urban		Rural	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Total	54.08	15.82	44.34	14.86	56.16	16.01
15 – 19	1.95	1.54	1.44	1.19	2.05	1.61
20 – 24	25.69	5.92	12.34	5.04	28.61	6.10
25 – 29	57.19	10.29	35.33	9.22	62.17	10.51
30 – 34	73.87	14.58	56.69	13.39	77.81	14.81
35 – 39	82.50	18.93	71.48	17.78	85.06	19.16
40 – 44	87.06	23.53	79.78	23.27	88.91	23.59
45 – 49	89.81	28.49	83.84	29.47	91.18	28.30
50 – 54	90.80	33.00	85.72	34.34	91.83	32.75
55 – 59	90.26	34.93	84.99	36.55	91.17	34.66
60 +	74.35	28.05	68.60	27.47	75.19	28.15

Source: [NIS 2000b: 21]

* The number of male or female household heads per hundred of the same sex in a given group

between the sexes.

However, various other factors mentioned above of course produce female heads as well. For example, there is a certain portion of divorced women in any age group of adults, and the recent increase of young single female workers at garment factories might contribute to the number of single female households in the urban areas.

Characteristics of Female Household Heads in Cambodia

Although female-headed households seem less advantaged because of the socioeconomic conditions of Cambodian women in general, the census data tells us that poverty appears to be higher among male-headed households (37%) than among female-headed households (33%) [Cambodia, MoP 1999: 12]. One possible explanation for this rather surprising fact is that the gap of the average age between the male heads (42.3 years old) and the female heads (50.1 years old) has economic implications, i.e. poorer households tend to have younger heads than do richer ones in Cambodia [*ibid.*: 14].

Another fact is that the ratio of female-headed households is higher in the urban areas than in the rural areas. It should be noted that the urban female-headed households include single households of young women and households headed by an unmarried mother. However, the ratio of such households is probably less in the rural areas due to the marriage system and customs that will be described later in this paper. In the rural areas, where the ratio of ever-married population is very high among adults [NIS 2000b: 13], most female household heads are considered to be women who lost a spouse and became a single parent and/or a lone income earner. This condition is contrastive to that of male household heads, because the ratio of currently married males is apparently much higher than that of currently married

females.⁴⁾ In other words, it can be assumed that most male-headed households may include more than one income earner, while most female-heads tend to be a lone income earner. Furthermore, female heads are disadvantaged in terms of occupation and education [*ibid.*: 65]. For example, more than a third of them are aged 50 years and above, more than half are illiterate, and more than 70% of female heads in the rural areas did not complete primary level education or had no education at all [*ibid.*: 23–24].

III Kinship and Marriage System of the Study Site

Outline of the General Condition of Village S

The study site, Village S is located in Kdanh Commune of Prey Kabbas District in the northern Takaev Province in the plain region⁵⁾ — about one hour and 40 minutes' drive from Phnom Penh along national route No. 2, and then along an unpaved road to the east. Besides Phnom Penh, Takaev Province has the second highest population density in the country, at 222 people per km², and that of Prey Kabbas District is even higher [NIS 1999: 253–254]. Concerning the situation of women, the sex ratio of Takaev Province is slightly lower (91.2) than the national average (93.0), while the percentage of female-headed households (26.5%) and the percentage of female heads of household aged 40 and over (61.7%) in Takaev Province are both almost the same as the national average (25.7% and 62.1%, respectively) [NIS 2000b: 26, 29]. Thus it appears that taking Village S in Takaev Province for a case study of female-headed households of Cambodia is reasonable, but we have to note that this area has the particularity of a high population density.

Most people in this district are basically engaged in agriculture, mainly in paddy rice cultivation. For many generations women have passed on the traditional silk textile industry in Prey Kabbas and the neighboring districts in northern Takaev.⁶⁾ Generally speaking, rice is mainly for personal consumption, and textiles for cash income.

The population of Village S mainly consists of Khmers, the majority group of Cambodia, with some Khmer-speaking Chinese-Khmers.⁷⁾ The latter are not new immigrants and are considered as the descendants of those whom settled in this area at least three to four generations ago. Although some Chinese Khmers celebrate seasonal festivals according to the Chinese calendar, there is neither practical distinction between the Khmers and the Chinese-

4) The percentage of currently married males aged 20 and over is 79%, while that of females is 66% (if aged 50 and over, the ratio is 89% and 55% respectively), according to the author's calculation based on the data in NIS [2000a: 77, 87].

5) *General Population Census of Cambodia 1998* divides the country into four natural regions: 1) plain region, 2) Tonle Sap region, 3) coastal region, and 4) plateau and mountain region [NIS 1999: 30].

6) In the plain region, Kampong Cham and Takaev are famous for their silk textile production. In Takaev, the northern districts including Prey Kabbas are the main production areas.

7) Although almost no Chinese-Khmers in Village S can speak Chinese or read Chinese characters, some still have the Chinese vocabulary of kinship terms (probably in the Chaozhou dialect) when speaking at home.

Khmer nor discrimination of each other. Both are Theravada Buddhists, supporting together a Buddhist temple located in the village through the organization of a lay people's temple committee. Ethnic factors probably have no relevance to the kinship and marriage system in the Village.

Due to the shortage of farmland to be reclaimed even before the civil war, in the past some groups of people migrated to other provinces with the lower population densities, such as Bat Dambang. At present there are those who became migrant workers, mostly men, to earn cash income in the urban/rural areas. On the other hand, although working for a garment factory on the outskirts of Phnom Penh is becoming more and more popular among young women in the plain and Tonle Sap region, this trend had not reached Village S women by 2002.

During the Democratic Kampuchea period (the Pol Pot regime), the land ownership system was broken down, and the population was restructured as units (*kâng*) based on age and potential physical strength. No opposition or resistance was possible; the villagers had to obey the new system that was administrated by what they called *ângkar* (literally, organization). Some families were accused of being rich or not loyal to the new regime and were taken to a distant province, mostly to the northwestern region of Cambodia. The relationships between a mother and an infant child and between married couples were not separated, but other people had to belong to a *kâng* and were forced to work with other members in the same *kâng* who might not be one's own family members. Young people in general were considered as the most reliable labor force, so many of them in Village S, both men and women, were sent to the construction site of a barrage for irrigation in Angkor Borei District, where the working conditions were extremely severe. Younger children and elderly people did not have to move to a different district, but they were still forced to move fairly often to other communes, villages or houses, according to the villagers, probably because *ângkar* tried to make the people give up the feeling of ownership of a house and other things. A few young men and women were taken away to the mountain region in the east and conscripted into the Khmer Rouge (KR) army. Thus, although family ties were not completely destroyed, the household as a livelihood unit was dismantled during this time.

As soon as the Pol Pot regime collapsed, most villagers came back to the home village, mostly on foot from other villages, communes, districts, or provinces, except those conscripted people who could not escape from the KR camp until the 1990s. There were also so-called *procheachon thmei* (new people) who were evacuated from Phnom Penh area to this region. Villagers say that most of them were taken to other provinces during the regime, and consequently almost nobody remained in this village.⁸⁾ Although many families lost more than one member by disease or execution, the villagers resumed their family lives relatively soon.

8) There is one case of the adoption of a *procheachon thmei* child. The child was born in Phnom Penh, became an orphan after she was taken to Village S, and then she was given shelter and adopted by one childless couple of Village S.

Households of Village S

The author has previously written a detailed description of the present systems of kinship and marriage of Village S [Takahashi 2001: 222–238], so only brief outlines of the findings are shown in the rest of this section.

The population of Village S in 2000 was 824. Table 2 shows that the sex ratio is generally low among the population aged 30 and over, and the population under 20 accounts for more than half of the whole population. These conditions are similar to the nationwide tendency.

Table 2 Population of Village S by Age and Sex, 2000

Age	Total	Males	Females	Sex Ratio
0 – 9	195	94	101	93.1
10 – 19	213	99	114	86.8
20 – 29	114	58	56	103.6
30 – 39	106	45	61	73.8
40 – 49	75	32	43	74.4
50 – 59	61	27	34	79.4
60 – 69	39	19	20	95.0
70 + *	21	7	14	50.0
Total	824	381	443	86.0

Source: The author's research

* The eldest is a 99-year-old male.

The number of households⁹⁾ is 161, so the average household size is 5.1, which is identical to the average household size of other rural areas [NIS 1999: 10]. Table 3 shows the number of households classified by the types of household formation. The nuclear family type (Type B) is the most common at 64.0%, and the extended family types (Types C and D) account for 31.0%. Type C includes both patrilocal and matrilocal formations. Type D includes a variety of member compositions, which indicates the flexibility of the household formation in this village or this area. However, a joint family type of household, which is comprised of two or more (currently) married siblings living together, was not found.

The inclinations of Village S are similar to Village Svay where M. Ebihara conducted research before the civil war;¹⁰⁾ 75% of all households were nuclear or lineal family types, and the majority of the rest were extended family types with various kinds of collateral members [Ebihara 1968: 106–107]. If we suppose these two villages are typical in the southern plain

9) "Household" in this paper means a unit of the living where the members share food and livelihood. A Khmer word, *kruosar*, is roughly equivalent to "family," but it should be noted that *kruosar* can mean either (1) a unit of married couple with/without children, (2) one's spouse, or (3) a household or a group of household members, according to the context. (1) signifies that one household may consist of more than one *kruosar*. In the author's view, terms such as *phateah* (literally, meaning "house") or *neak phateah* (meaning "house resident(s)") have a closer meaning of "household."

10) Village Svay is located in Kandal Province which adjoins Takaev Province. The distance between Village S and Village Svay is around 30 kilometers.

Table 3 Households by Formation Types, Village S, 2000

	Types of Formation	Number of Households	Ratio (%)
Type A	Conjugal family	4	2.5
Type B	Nuclear family	103	64.0
Type C	Lineal family	34	21.1
	2 Generations	2	
	3 Generations	31	
	4 Generations	1	
Type D	Collaterally Extended family	16	9.9
	Type B Extended	6	
	Type C Extended	10	
Type E	Single person	4	2.5
	Total	161	100

Source: The author's research

region of Cambodia in terms of household formation, it can be presumed that little has changed even after the experience of household dismantlement during the Pol Pot regime.

While the naming system has a patrilineal tendency,¹¹⁾ the kinship recognition is basically bilateral. People have a relatively wide range of recognition in collateral relatives; for example, they have the term “third cousin.”¹²⁾ It does not necessarily mean that people remember an individual's name, but they recognize the relationship.

The Marriage System of Village S

First of all, Cambodian marriage in rural areas is monogamous, both in terms of the custom and the law. Roughly speaking, there are two forms of marriage¹³⁾: 1) introduction to future spouse, mostly by one's parents, relatives, or acquaintances, and 2) according to one's own preference (mostly a man's), which includes so-called “love marriages” but these are rather rare. The case of 1) clearly outnumbers 2), partly because villagers consider that, after all, the parents or elders of one's family should approve the marriage, and that pre-marital romantic or sexual relationship is a sort of moral deviation. In either case, in order to make a legitimate match, the male side [the man and his parent(s) or elder relative(s)] should propose marriage to the woman's parents. In most cases, the wedding ceremony and party are held at the bride's house, no matter where the newlywed couple resides after the ceremony.

11) A Cambodian person's name consists of two parts. In most cases (there are some variations), the first part is derived from either part of the father's name or the paternal grandfather's name, and the second part is given newly when the person is born. However, people (except the royal or aristocratic family members) do not recognize that the first part of the name should be passed down from generation to generation. Sometimes members of one family do not hold a common name as the first part. Thus the first part of the name, in most cases, is neither a “family name” nor a “lineage name.”

12) This is the relationship of the people who have common great-grandparents.

13) There was another kind of marriage system, so-called “forced marriage,” which occurred during the Pol Pot regime. There are in total 18 such cases among the people born in Village S.

The marriage between relatives appears in 110 cases of marriage, which accounts for around one third of the total number of marriages in Village S that could be traced back.¹⁴⁾ It seems that being a relative is considered as a crucial point for a trustworthy union; elders often try to make a match even between the two relatives who have never met each other. As written above, a “relative” includes a wide range of collateral relationships. In the total number of marriages between relatives, the percentage of cousin marriage is 32%, second cousin marriage 44%, and the rest are marriages between a distant relationship and between relatives through in-law relationships. Cousin marriage occurs collaterally; no particular lineal preference was observed.

Tables 4 and 5 show the geographical range of marriage. We can observe that 1) Marriage between Village S inhabitants occurs most frequently; 2) More men marry into Village S from outside than women do; 3) More women born in Village S stay in Village S after marriage than men do; and 4) More men born in Village S marry out and move farther to marry out than women do. The phenomenon of 4) includes cases of migrant male workers who are from Village S finding a spouse where they are working. Overall, men move more than women in marriage.

This inclination is reflected in the residential pattern after the wedding. There are three patterns of residence in Village S: patrilocal, matrilocal, and neolocal.¹⁵⁾ Out of total 319 cases of

Table 4 Geographical Range of Inter-Marriage: Inhabitants of Village S, 2000

Wife→ Husband ↓	A*	B	C	D	E	F	n.d.**	Total
A*	45	8	5	5	14	0	6	83
B	9	1	1	0	0	0	0	11
C	26	0	2	1	2	0	2	33
D	8	0	1	0	1	0	0	10
E	17	0	0	0	1	0	2	20
F	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
n.d.**	48	0	6	0	2	0	—	56
Total	153	9	15	20	20	0	10	213

Source: The author's research

* “A” to “F” indicates birthplaces as follows:

A = Village S, B = other village in the same commune, C = other commune in the same district, D = other district in the same province, E = other province in Cambodia, F = other country

** No data

- 14) The data includes marriage cases of both 1) all the ever-married people who resided in Village S when the research was conducted, and 2) the villagers' family members who were born in Village S and then married out from Village S.
- 15) The author could not obtain clear information of residential patterns of all the 319 couples. Therefore, in the case of marry-in/marry-out couples, “patri- or matrilocal” here means the residence in the husband's or the wife's “village” rather than “house.” For example, if the husband moved to Village S from outside for marriage, it is counted as “matrilocal,” and vice versa.

Table 5 Geographical Range of “Marriage-Out” from Village S, 2000

	Males	Females
B	8	5
C	9	13
D	9	5
E	36	15
F	0	1
Total	62	39

Source: The author’s research

Note: “B” to “F” indicates the place of present residence as follows:

B = other village in the same commune, C = other commune
in the same district, D = other district in the same province, E
= other province in Cambodia, F = other country

marriage, the author obtained data of 225 cases in total about the residential pattern. The result can be summed up as: 77 patrilocal cases, 134 matrilocal cases, 13 neolocal cases, and 1 other case.¹⁶⁾ Thus there are all three patterns, but matrilocal residence is definitely dominant.

Divorce and Remarriage

Due to the lack of diachronic data on the villagers’ life cycle including divorce and remarriage, the author is not able to discuss these matters sufficiently here. For instance, no data on the transition of the number of divorce cases in Village S has been gathered. In addition to this, the author has not yet fully explored Khmer people’s views on divorce in terms of gender. Yet, no disparaging term or phrase in Khmer for divorced women has been observed so far. As Ebihara reports that a relatively young divorcée would find another husband within a short while in Village Svay [Ebihara 1968: 497], presumably there have been few social obstacles for women to remarry in rural Cambodia. It should also be noted that a Khmer term, *me may*, which means a woman who was once married but now has no husband, indicates both a widow and a divorcée with no distinction.

While remarriage in Village Svay was relatively easy, it seems that there are fewer remarriage cases in Village S. There are only 4 couples by remarriage among all the inhabitants in Village S, but there are as many as 69 people (both female and male) who are currently widowed or divorced (47 widowed, 22 divorced). On the other hand, the fact that divorced women (15) outnumbered divorced men (7) suggests that it may be easier to remarry for men than for women. During the interviews, the female household heads as young divorcées did not deny the possibility of their future remarriage, but some also mentioned the difficulty of remarriage due to their poverty.

16) The last case is exceptional. A man who had adopted a son remarried a woman who had a daughter by a former marriage. Later the adopted son and the daughter married, and all of them live together at present. Therefore, this could be called a crossover case of patrilocal and matrilocal residences.

Land Distribution and Inheritance

With the end of the socialist land system in 1985, the so-called *krom samakki* (solidarity group) system was completely demolished.¹⁷⁾ Farmers started to obtain tenure of farmland that was distributed to each household.¹⁸⁾ The area of distributed land depended upon the number of household members, i.e. 15 ares per one person regardless of his/her age or health condition. For example, a household which had 5 members gained 75 ares of farmland. Thus the household turned into a unit of labor and livelihood again just as it was before the Pol Pot regime.

Traditionally, the land of parents is evenly divided and given to children when they marry. The child who lives with the parents for the longest is likely to inherit the house and the cattle. In most cases, this child is the youngest daughter, but there is no strict norm; a son or elder child could also inherit. It depends, as the villagers say, both on the situation and on the parents' preference. As we saw before, daughters are less likely to marry out to far places than sons, so the daughters, even after marriage, tend to live relatively close to their parents' house. Therefore, generally speaking, the relationship between sisters and between parents and daughters can be kept close.

IV The Livelihood Situation of Female-Headed Households in Village S

Who Are Female Household Heads?

The Khmers call a householder or a representative of a household *me kruosar*¹⁹⁾; they are basically the eldest person of the household's members. But in the case of a married couple, people consider that the husband has priority over the wife even if the husband is younger. So, a female *me kruosar* is mostly the eldest and also a husband-less woman of the household's members. In this paper, however, the author defines that a female household head is a woman who takes responsibility for managing the household's livelihood. Therefore, a female household head in this paper is not completely equal to a female *me kruosar*. For example, an elderly widowed woman living with her daughter and her husband (son-in-law) might not be a household head if the responsibility for the household's livelihood was already transferred to the daughter and/or the son-in-law.

Therefore, households with a divorced or widowed woman 1) who has other dependants in her family such as single children, elderly parents, and other members, or 2) who lives alone with no dependants, is regarded as a "female-headed household." According to the author's research in 2000, there were 12 cases of fatherless (single mother) female-headed households among Type B (nuclear family) households.²⁰⁾ In examining the data such as marital status,

17) The year that the land distribution started varied from region to region in Cambodia.

18) As to the transformation of the land ownership system after the *krom samakki* period, see Amakawa [2001].

19) *Kruosar* here means "household" (see footnote 9).

20) There is only one mother-less (single father) household among Type B households.

age, and household structure, 30 households in total are judged as female-headed, which accounts for 18.6% of all the households in Village S. Excluding some cases of marital status change after 2000, the author conducted interviews and could obtain data from 18 female-headed households in 2002. (The summary of each household's condition is shown in Table 6.)

Formation of Female-headed Households

Roughly speaking, the younger household heads are divorced women, and the older heads are mostly widowed. Not all widowed female household heads lost their husbands during the Pol Pot regime, so not all these cases particularly reflect the social turmoil in the 1970s. Concerning divorce, some cases of divorced female heads indicate how livelihood situations can be differentiated.

[Case 2]²¹⁾ I (28 years old) got married in 1994 and divorced by agreement in 1998. I live with my 6-year-old son. At present I have 30 ares of land; 15 is originally mine, and my parents gave me another 15 when I married because they had enough land. The rice harvested from my land is not enough; I have to buy rice for 3 months worth of rice. But my livelihood is not so bad, because I can produce silk textiles of good quality, which sell at a higher price. I earn 600 dollars²²⁾ a year. Until two years ago, the selling price for one *kben*²³⁾ was 30 dollars, but the price went down to 20 dollars, so the net profit is only 5 to 6 dollars a *kben*. Because I can weave the *phtei muk pi*²⁴⁾ type of textile, my *mouy* (client/middleman) extends credit to me for the silk materials. I sometimes borrow money from villagers at the interest rate of 600 riel per 10,000 riel. Unlike EMT,²⁵⁾ this person does not demand any written contract or pledge, so it is easy to borrow. I want to concentrate more on weaving, but it is difficult when I am busy with agriculture. For farming, I do *provas dai* (labor exchange) only, but no *chuol* (labor employment). *Provas dai* partners change depending on the situation; they may be my sisters' husbands, cousins, or neighbors. After my divorce, labor management and other things became tougher for me, but my mind became somewhat stronger, so I never stopped making the effort to support my son and myself. I need money for my son's education. There is absolutely no support from or

21) Case numbers are identical to those in Table 6.

22) The exchange rate for US\$ was about 4,000 riel in 2002.

23) A Cambodian unit of textile size. One *kben* is 1 meter × 3.8 meter, from which two pieces of *sampot* (Cambodian traditional long skirt) can be made [Kojin 2003: 146].

24) Women in Village S recognize two kinds of textiles: *phtei muk muoy* and *phtei muk pi*. The latter is thicker, has more elaborate pattern designs, needs higher skill to weave, and therefore sells at a higher price.

25) A financial firm specializing in micro finance in Cambodia. EMT is an acronym of "Ennatien Moulethan Tchonnebat" (in Khmer), which used to be one department of a French NGO, GRETE (Group de Recherche et d'Echanges Technologiques). EMT has micro finance activities in nine provinces including Takaev. Client targets are "people who live in the rural area and have non-farm income." Seventy-five percent of the clients are women, according to the interview at the head office in Phnom Penh in 2002.

communication with my ex-husband. He never visits here to see his son after the divorce. When we divorced, I returned the ox that was given from his parents. He and I built this house together, but it was left for me. I have parents and two sisters in this village. There is no regular aid from them, but we sometimes bring food to each other, help with festival expenditures together, and sometimes I can borrow a small amount of cash with no interest from my sisters to buy food. I have a dream of starting a business (opening a shop), but I do not have enough funds yet.

[Case 4] In this house, I (32 years old) live with my two children (the elder is a 14-year-old boy) and my mother (75 years old). My parents were born in Village S. My father died of *chumngeu pih* (disease of tumor) at the age of 49 just before the Pol Pot regime was over. At present we have certain difficulties due to the lack of male labor support, but when my father died, the situation at that time was much tougher. We had no house, so we used to sleep under a mango tree. There were only three of us then: my mother, her elder sister who also became a widow during the Pol Pot regime, and me; all women. I am the youngest child of my parents; that's why I take care of my mother. The eldest and second brothers are living in this village. I am close to them and to their wives. Other brothers and one sister live in other provinces. I got married in 1987 and divorced in 1990. My ex-husband is from this village, but he is not my relative. He remarried and lives in another commune now. I think he was not satisfied with his marriage to me probably because I am too poor. I have never received any financial support from my ex-husband because he is also poor. We have 45 ares of land: 15 of my mother's, 15 of mine, and 15 of my elder son's that used to belong to my ex-husband. We have some shortage of rice; we have to buy 2 to 3 *tav*.²⁶⁾ As my children grow, they eat more. I earn an income from weaving. I weave 2 *kben* of *phteï muk pi* type silk textile, which brings me 20 dollars of income. This amount is not enough, so I borrow some from EMT. Usually my *mouy* extends me credit so that I can get the material for the textile, but when they themselves do not have enough cash, I have to borrow some from EMT and buy the material from the *mouy*. I always feel difficulty in paying back the money with interest. But I have never borrowed money from my brothers or sister, because they are not rich either. I would like to produce more textiles, but I cannot spare time only for weaving. My son is the only assistant in growing rice. I utilize both *provas dai* and *chuol*. Sometimes I rely on my brother's help in labor, too.

[Case 13] I (55 years old) have to support my daughter (about 23) and one grandson. My son married out and had two children, but he returned to this house with one of the children when he got divorced. (The other child went to the wife's side.) My son and my single younger sister are working outside the village at present. My son is working in the

26) A unit of amount in Khmer. One *tav* equals about 18 liters, but there are some regional variations. In the study area, 1 *tav* of rice weighs 15 kg.

Table 6 The Situation of Female-Heads and Their Households of Village S, 2002

No.	Age of the Female-head	Health Condition	Marital Status*	Place of Residence at Present	Family Members** (age)	Close Relatives in the Village	Area of Rice Field (are)	Cattle	Rice for Personal Consumption	Cash Income (US\$)
1	23	○	D	Village S	S(3)	mother, younger sister	15	0	lack 5 months worth	textiles (142?)
2	28	○	D	Village S	S(6)	parents, sisters	30	0	lack 3 months worth	textiles (600)
3	31	○	D	Village S	S(9), D(6), D(2)	2 aunts, 1 elder brother, 1 elder sister	0	0	lack 100% (buy all)	sales of cakes, casual aid from aunt
4	32	○	D	Village S	M(75), S(14), D(7)	2 elder brothers	45	2 for sale	lack 2-3 <i>tav</i> ***	textile (280)
5	32	○?	D	Phnom Penh	F(74)	3 siblings	15	0	lack 6 months worth	(textiles abandoned) sales in Phnom Penh, casual aid from siblings
6	33	○?	D	Kandal Province	M(77), sister(45), brother(40), S(9), S(9),	1 elder sister, 1 mother-side aunt	60	2 for breed	lack 2 months worth	(textiles abandoned) sales in Kandal Province, aid from eldest brother
7	36	○	W	Village S	D(14), S(9), S(5)	3 younger sisters	30	1 for breed	lack ? <i>tav</i>	textile (270)
8	39	○	W	Village S	sister(29), S(19), D(14), S(8)	1 elder brother, 1 female cousin	75	3	lack 2 months worth	textiles (180), casual aid from husband's relatives
9	39	△	W	Village S	S(16), S(14), D(12)	F, 1 younger sister	42	0	lack 15 <i>tav</i>	(textiles halted) sales of small livestock and fruits
10	47	○	①W②S	Village S	D(19), S-in-law, D(13), D(9), D(8)	2 sisters	45	1	lack ? <i>tav</i>	textiles (100), midwife fee (100)
11	53	○	D	Village S	S(13), niece	2 elder sisters	45	1	sufficient	textiles (192?)
12	54	○	W	Village S	D(23), D(21), D(19), D(16), D(15), grand S(6), grand S(3)	5 sisters	50<	1 for breed	lack 2 months worth	textiles (360)
13	55	△	D	Village S	sister(46), S(25), D(23), grand S,	2 female cousins	45	0	lack ? <i>tav</i>	textiles of subcontract (?), casual aid from the family members working outside
14	57	○	W	Village S	D(31), S-in-law, 2 children	sister's husband, 1 niece, 1 elder sister	45	1	lack 7 <i>tav</i> (6 months worth)	textiles (130?)

15	57	○	W	Village S	none	1 elder brother, 1 elder sister, nephew, niece, cousins	15	0	sufficient	textiles (400)
16	59	○	W	Village S	D(36), S(22), grand S(7)	3 sisters	45	2	sufficient	textiles (120)
17	61	○	①W②D	Village S	D(19), S(17)=monk	children by ①	45 (15)#	2	lack 5-6 months worth	?
18	65	○	W	Village S	none	3 children	30	?	lack 20 <i>tav</i>	textiles (180)

Source: The author's research

* D = divorced, W = widowed, S = separated

** S = son, D = daughter, M = mother, F = father. The underlined persons are temporarily living separately.

*** *tav* = a Khmer unit; 1 *tav* = 18 liters. The price of 1 *tav* of paddy is 14,000 to 15,000 riel (= 3.5 to 3.8 dollars).

Only 15 ares of land out of 45 ares is suitable for rice cultivation.

cornfield in the northwestern region. I just came back from my visit to him, and feel sick now. I am afraid I caught malaria. I cannot rely on their income, because their jobs are not regular. They sometimes come back to this village and give me some money. My husband sold some land to make money (when he was still married to me) to hold the wedding ceremony with his second wife. Yes, he found her before he divorced me. The villagers accused him of the abandonment, because I was in my third month of pregnancy with my second child then. But he still left me. Now he is living in the next village with his present wife and his new children. I was left alone, so I used to take my babies to the rice field and work alone. I have two female cousins in this village. Sometimes their husbands or son help me for free of charge or for a little money. Otherwise I utilize *provas dai* and *chuol*, but when I am not well, I cannot exchange labor, which is a trouble. But my daughter helps me some. I always have a shortage of rice. One of my younger sisters lives in the neighboring village, so if I really have no rice to eat, maybe I could ask help from her. I have never borrowed money because I am afraid I will not be able to pay it back. But I sometimes buy medicine on credit. I am not so healthy. I had 60 ares of rice field in total, but now 45 remains because I sold 15 last year. This year I think that I might give up rice planting but do sowing due to the lack of water. I could have pumped the pond water near the rice field, but other people have pumped it out already; we have to pay 5,000 riel per hour for the usage of the pump machine, but I could not make the money in time, so it is too late now. I weave silk textiles, but by subcontract, because I do not have my own loom. I get the warp from the loom owner, buy the weft by myself, and weave. When I produce two *kben*, I hand one *kben* to the loom owner, and sell the other by myself. My textile is the *phtei muk muoy* type. Its price is 15,000 riel per *kben*.

Among the nine cases of divorce, most occurred when the couple's child/children were still infants or when the wife was pregnant. Mostly the husband leaves alone, leaving the child/children behind with the wife. Moreover, the father-child relationship is also cut off, and neither financial nor moral support from him is expected. Most of the ex-husbands remarried relatively soon, while the ex-wives remain single. These pieces of information about divorce may seem rather one-sided since the author did not interview any ex-husbands. Therefore, the causes of divorce are not discussed here. However, looking at the present situation of these households, it appears that most divorce cases occur with the husband's abandonment of his family and the desertion of the responsibility as a parent in particular.

The cases of divorce occurred among the households of both neolocal and matrilocal residences, but the common point is that the husbands are from outside Village S (except Case 4) and the wives are from Village S or have been Village S residents since before marriage (except Case 3). After divorce all the ex-husbands left Village S and started a new life. This fact suggests that the moral obstacles to divorce may be rather small for the husband as an "outsider," because even though he is criticized about his divorce in Village S, he is able to leave Village S.

Marriage to an “outsider” has another disadvantage in terms of land ownership. When a husband marries into Village S, he usually leaves his own portion of land in his home village and does not gain a new portion in Village S, except rare cases of the expanding of land by purchase after marriage. Mostly, this type of marriage usually brings no additional land to the couple. This is in contrast to the marriage to a man who is from Village S. When they marry, the area of the couple’s land becomes the total of the husband’s and the wife’s at least. If the husband dies earlier, the wife inherits his portion of land. Therefore, as far as widows are concerned, the marriages to an inhabitant of Village S are more advantaged than those to an “outsider.” In the case of divorce, however, the wife is not likely to gain her husband’s land no matter whether he is from Village S or outside.

Regarding the dependent members, while six female household heads have only one child, nine female heads have other dependents besides their children, such as elderly parents, single or currently unmarried siblings or younger relatives, a divorced or widowed child and grandchildren. Two have no dependents and are living alone, and the one other has both a married child and a single child who are both young. Almost all the cases lack of full labor support by an adult male. Some even have physically incapable adult member, and at least two female household heads are not so healthy. In general, the more members the household has, the heavier loads the household head should bear.

The Livelihood Situation of the Female-headed Household

Overall, most Village S households have some shortage of rice for personal consumption. It can be presumed that the female-headed households are in a more serious condition. Only 3 households out of the 18 answered that they can produce a sufficient amount of rice. Some households lack the amount of almost half a year’s worth. Recently divorced female heads, especially, tend to have less area of land. One reason is that marriage with an “outsider” husband does not bring about any land expansion, as mentioned above, and the other reason is that land distribution ceased by 1989 in this commune. Therefore, the children who were born after that period cannot hold land, which means that in the future they will have difficulty in producing enough rice.

Even if a household holds enough area of land for growing their staple food, another problem is the lack of labor force. Out of 18 female-headed households interviewed, 8 do not have any member who can provide full agricultural labor besides the household head. The male-headed households usually have the mild division of labor based upon gender. Men are responsible for overall agriculture including farmland maintenance and cattle care. Women are in charge of house chores, childcare, smaller animal care such as fowl and pigs, general agriculture, and weaving silk textiles for cash income. Although both men and women get involved in rice cultivation labor, especially in the busiest seasons, those who pull the plow over and level a rice field with cattle force are mostly men. Agricultural mechanization has not been introduced to Village S yet (except rice polishers and water pumps), so the amount of manual labor is still crucial for basic livelihood, i.e. production of food. In Village S, if a household has

both male and female adult labor forces with enough land, and their division of labor works out, then it may sustain its livelihood well enough. Female-headed households definitely lack these conditions. Female heads mostly have the difficulty in balancing food production and earning enough cash income from their limited labor resources.

V Livelihood Strategy of Female-Headed Households

Supplement of Agricultural Labor Force

One of the difficulties of female-headed households is the constant lack of labor force. If the selling price of silk textiles were high enough, some women might be able to abandon rice growing and concentrate on weaving textiles. However, in reality, even the women who can earn relatively high income by weaving, such as in Case 2 and Case 11, have not stopped rice cultivation. Thus growing rice is the most reliable and important occupation to support livelihood, and silk textiles are considered the second in most households (except in the landless Case 3). The heads of Case 5 and 6 abandoned both agriculture and weaving and moved to an urban area to earn cash income. These are the exceptional cases in Village S so far, but their households also still hold a rice field and keep managing the rice cultivation.

During the cycle of rice cultivation, the busy times are as follows: 1) plowing and leveling the rice field, 2) pulling out the seedlings from rice nurseries and replanting them in the rice field, and 3) harvesting and threshing. While 1) needs one adult male and a pair of cattle with a plow, 2) and 3) require an intensive labor force in a short period of time. Therefore, in the non-mechanized agricultural areas in Cambodia, most households need a larger labor force than can be provided by its family members during the busy seasons. In order to fulfill the required labor force, one out of the three measures below or the combination of any are utilized, according to each household's situation in terms of the number of household members, the area of land, and the amount of cash that can be spent, etc.: (1) *provas dai* (labor exchange), (2) *chuol (ke)* (labor employment), (3) *chuoy* (help, meaning that the labor supply is free of charge).

People utilize measure (1) only when they can pay back the same amount of labor; for example, if two members of Household A provided labor for planting in the rice field of Household B for two days, Household B should pay back to Household A with the same amount of labor (2 persons \times 2 days) within the same season. There is no payment in cash for (1), but the labor-supplied household should provide a big lunch with liquor to the people who came to work on the day. In the case of a female-headed household, if there is enough labor force in the household, they can select (1).

When female-headed households need to plow the rice field, if the household selects (1), the half-day of plowing and leveling labor by a man can be exchanged for two days labor for rice planting, or if the household prefers (2), they pay cash to the man who provides the plowing labor. The payment of all labor by (2) is fixed in the village and neighboring area. For example, the labor of plowing and leveling by a man plus a pair of cattle for half a day is 4,000 riel plus

breakfast and lunch. One-day labor of rice planting is 4,000 riel per person. Harvesting labor is paid by the piece: 700 riel for one *phlon*, which equals 40 wisps, and one-night labor of threshing is 500 riel. There are two cases among the female-headed households in which all the agricultural labor is managed by the female head's own labor and by measure (2), because they can afford to make all the payment in cash.

In the single female households (Cases 15 and 18), the women adopt other measures. They let a son or a nephew in the neighborhood cultivate all the land and split the harvest and the expenditure for fertilizer. This is one way of utilizing kinship resources.

Measure (3) can be adopted when one has healthy parents or close relatives who are living nearby. Due to the predominance of matrilineal residence, a woman is likely to have her own parents, sisters, or daughters in the neighborhood. As Table 6 shows, 14 female heads mentioned their female relatives as close relatives in the village in the interview. These relationships enable a female head to ask for labor help not only from her female relatives but also from, for example, her sister's husband, her sister's son, her daughter's husband, and so forth. However, as the term *chuoy* (help) indicates, this kind of labor supply is considered a casual one, and it should be paid back in some way in the long run. Between close relationships, people also borrow and lend small amounts of money or rice to each other, share festival food, etc. fairly often, but these exchanges should be reciprocal as well. While parents and close relatives are suitable for (3) and sometimes for (1), they are not for (2), whereas cousins and other more distant relationships are considered suitable for (1) or (2) but not (3).

As already mentioned, a divorced woman cannot expect any labor support in the form of (1), (2), or (3) from her ex-husband or his relatives. Widowed female heads sometimes maintain relationships with the deceased husband's parents or relatives, but there were no labor supply cases among these interviewed households.

Cash Income

No households in Village S make a living only from agricultural products or income. Even a household that harvests sufficient rice for personal consumption needs cash to cover various expenses for other foods, children's school fees, clothes, medicines, ceremonial occasions and so forth. The most common means to earn cash income is by weaving silk textiles. This is a local industry, traditionally sustained by women for generations.²⁷⁾ At present silkworms are not bred in this region, so raw silk, the main material of the silk textiles, is brought in from foreign countries.²⁸⁾

Textile production consists of many processes. To sum up, there is the preparation of warp and weft, coloring, and finally weaving with the loom. Mostly one weaver does all these processes alone at her home. In Village S there is no factory-like studio or workshop where many people work together on the basis of the division of labor. However, there are a few cases

27) Weavers are mostly women, but the author saw at least one man who weaves regularly in Village S.

28) According to Kojin's research, recently textile retailers in Phnom Penh do more business with middlemen who deal with Vietnamese silk thread [Kojin 2003: 154].

in which women specialize in the starting process only and then sell this half-processed material to other weavers (Case 11). Silk textiles are classified into *phthey muk muoy* (ordinary quality) and *phthey muk pi* (high quality). The price of the latter is higher. It requires materials of better quality, which are more expensive, and higher skill to weave. Thus the women who have the skill and can afford to buy the expensive material can weave textiles of high quality. Basically, a weaver buys the material from a *mouy* (client, who functions as middleman),²⁹⁾ and when she finishes weaving, the *mouy* buys it from her, and goes to Phnom Penh to sell it. If the weaver regularly produces much *phthey muk muoy*, she can soon buy the materials from the *mouy* by credit. There are several *mouy* in Village S and its neighboring villages. The *mouy* and the weaver do not always have a long-term fixed relationship. The *mouy* requires neither a due date nor a fixed workload from the weaver. Whenever the weaver finishes one *kben* or more, the *mouy* comes to buy it.

In 2002, women were saying that the selling price of silk textiles was falling to two-thirds or one-third of the former price. This price decline dealt a blow to the weavers who produce the textiles of ordinary quality only, because a low price makes a low net profit. According to the interviews in 2002, while 1 *kben* of ordinary quality sells at about 15,000 riel,³⁰⁾ which makes a net profit of 2,000 to 5,000 riel, 1 *kben* of high quality sells at about 20 dollars, which makes the net profit of 5 to 6 dollars. They say one person can produce 3 to 5 *kben* of the ordinary quality kind a month, which makes a net profit about 10,000 to 25,000 riel (which roughly accounts to 2 to 6 dollars). For the high quality kind, one person can produce 1 or 2 *kben* per month only, but makes a net profit of 5 to 12 dollars a month. Therefore, the skillful weavers naturally try to produce high quality textiles for greater profit. It is relatively easier for a married woman, who has a husband taking care of agriculture, to concentrate on weaving. A female household head, however, needs to borrow some cash not only to buy the materials of high quality textiles but also to pay for the labor employment of agriculture in order to spare enough time for weaving.³¹⁾ Thus the female heads who make best use of loans to gain more profits can be successful in keeping a higher income (as in Case 2).

VI Conclusion

This paper has described how female household heads who have to support themselves and/or their dependents try to sustain their livelihood in Village S, a rural village in Cambodia. Most of the female heads have some difficulties due to the lack of land, the lack of labor force, or

29) There are both male and female *mouy*. A female *mouy* is also sometimes a weaver herself.

30) The price varies, depending upon the quality and the design of the patterns of the product.

31) The most common forms of borrowing in Village S are as follows: 1) borrowing a small amount of cash with no interest from a parent, sibling or other close relative; 2) borrowing from a moneylender in the village with the interest of 600 to 700 riel per 10,000 riel; or 3) borrowing from EMT (see footnote 25) with the interest of 400 riel per 10,000 riel. One person can borrow up to 200,000 riel in a year by submitting an IOU with a pledge for 3). The way of 2) or 3) is usually taken to make purchases for the materials of the high quality textiles.

both. Land distribution, which took place in the 1980s, was reasonable in that the land was distributed according to the number of household members in those days. However, now young female heads have to support children who do not receive the benefit of the land distribution. Further, there are no institutional aid systems to support the poor on any administrative level, so there is almost no way for an individual female head to make ends meet with very limited resources.

Fortunately, however, the female heads in this village have at least two advantages in terms of resources of which they can make use: one is the predominance of matrilocal residence; the other is earning income through producing silk textiles.

The former brings about human resources for mutual aid, either in the form of labor exchange, labor employment, or plain help. This mutual aid is supplied among the local people in general, but the parents and close relatives living in the same village also play a significant role, especially the relative's networks of sisters and daughters. However, at the same time, matrilocal residential patterns may sometimes bring about some insecurity in marital life, especially in the case of marriage with a husband who comes from another village.

The latter has provided an important income source to the women in Village S for generations. In the case of a female head, if she can 1) fulfill the lack of agricultural labor force sufficiently, she can 2) have enough time to weave, and 3) have the ability to produce silk textiles of high quality. If she also 4) does not have many dependants, then she may be barely able to sustain her household by the cash income that she earns. However, it is getting more and more difficult these days due to the decline of the selling price of the textiles. If any among these four factors is absent, she may fail to balance the labor, the income, and the debt, and the livelihood of her household is likely to deteriorate shortly. At least two female heads have already given up making a living in the village and gone to other places alone to earn more cash income.

In this paper, the author did not analyze other labor such as housework, child rearing, religious activities, etc. In order to discuss labor from the viewpoint of gender, all the activities of daily life should be studied in detail. In addition, the author dealt with rice growing and weaving textiles as "labor" on the same level. Both are traditional activities, which the local people have passed down from generation to generation, but the two are very different in nature. Weaving textiles has an artistic aspect, which requires not only concentration and mature technique but also creativity in the pattern design and colors; each piece of work reflects its creator's originality to some extent. The amount of "effort" in productivity is also directly reflected in the profits that the weaver gains. These aspects probably provide some sort of self-esteem to the women as weavers, which may make a difference in the meaning of labor and gender. The author could also not explore this point.

Although their living is not so easy, female household heads, especially among the young generation, have told the author about their future business dreams. One woman wants to expand her pig raising into business; another is thinking of the possibility to breed silkworms to produce raw silk by herself; and another would like to open a shop. Women in Village S have

inherited the tradition to earn cash income by their own ability, so there is the hope that their creativity can pioneer new income sources which would lead to a better future.

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